Downtown Portland Waterfront Activation Strategy

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Recommended Citation  
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Watermark Planning would like to thank members of the general public who participated in this project and provided feedback. Their input and support is vital to activating the waterfront.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite longstanding ambitions and multiple planning efforts, Portland’s goal of embracing and enhancing the Willamette River as the heart of the Central City has only been partially fulfilled. Similar proposals for the downtown waterfront have repeatedly appeared in official planning documents over the past four decades, and yet the majority remain unimplemented. Many of those recommendations remain relevant today and continue to represent viable strategies for activating the downtown waterfront.

This plan represents a closer look at some key recommendations—both old and new—for activating the downtown waterfront. It also includes strategies for moving forward and measuring progress.

Existing Conditions

Waterfront Park is a beloved but underutilized public space that needs an update.

Portland’s downtown waterfront lacks vibrancy, largely as the result of difficult or unclear connections to the city’s downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as an absence of commercial activities and attractions in and around the park. There are often conflicts between modes, particularly pedestrians and cyclists, along the park’s very popular and limited pathways. In addition, there are few opportunities for commercial and recreational boating in Waterfront Park and limited opportunities for park visitors to engage directly with the river. Furthermore, a better balance between natural and human elements in the park—including native vegetation, geese, shallow water salmon habitat, and people—is desired. Finally, public use of the park, a regional amenity, is restricted during summer months due to the dedication of a large swath of the park for limited access events. Overall, the implementation of goals targeted at addressing many of these issues over recent years has been hampered by City fiscal constraints.

What the Public Said

During the four-month community engagement process, the public told Watermark Planning the following:

- The park does not live up to its full potential as a treasured Portland asset;
- There is a strong but unmet desire to gain greater access to the Willamette River via the park for swimming, boating and watersports;
- The boating community wants better access to the park and downtown from the river;
- Certain additional amenities (in particular, food and seating) must be present for the park become a more multipurpose and vibrant space year-round;
- The experience of walking and cycling both within and to the park should be enhanced; and
- There is a frustration with large events’ use of the park space, as it restricts free public access.

Recommendations by Theme

Watermark Planning has developed a set of recommendations to address both public feedback and goals that have been echoed through decades of waterfront planning.
These recommendations arise from three guiding principles:

1. Make the riverfront a vibrant place year-round.
2. Better connect the river to the downtown.
3. Promote and celebrate the riverfront as a public space and resource.

Watermark Planning’s recommendations have been organized under the following themes: placemaking, access & circulation, commercial & recreational boating, economic development, natural environment, and events.

Placemaking Goals
- Highlight Portland’s uniqueness through arts and culture on the waterfront
- Help people to understand and appreciate the waterfront’s historical and geographical context
- Make the park a regular and year-round destination where people want to spend time

Access & Circulation Goals
- Improve park visitors’ ability to access the water
- Improve connections to the park
- Improve circulation within the park

Commercial & Recreational Boating Goals
- Utilize the river as a transportation option
- Enhance river recreation

Economic Development Goals
- Expand commercial activities along Naito Parkway
- Expand commercial activities in the park
- Develop the waterfront and adjacent blocks as a commercial destination

Natural Environment Goals
- Enhance in-park and river habitat
- Engage the park visitors through educational displays and interactive science
- Reduce the impact of migratory and resident geese on the use and access of the park

Events Goal
- Manage event scope to balance the needs of park users and event attendees

Moving Forward:
A Strategic Framework

Given the history of consistent goals and non-implemented visions for Portland’s waterfront, a special focus has been placed on overcoming barriers to implementation within this plan. For that reason, Watermark Planning calls for the establishment of a private non-profit entity to plan, coordinate, implement, and manage waterfront projects within the Central Reach of the Willamette River. Such an organization would be a keeper of and champion for the city’s waterfront vision over time. This recommendation stems from Watermark Planning’s study of successful and exemplary waterfront development projects across the United States.

Benefits of a Non-Profit to the City of Portland
- The creation of a long-term waterfront vision and a phased implementation plan can buffer against shifting political priorities.
- An organization dedicated to the waterfront would prioritize obtaining funding for projects as a cornerstone of its mission.
- This organization would provide additional capacity to manage the funding of everyday maintenance and capital projects on Portland’s Central City waterfront.
- Portland Parks and Recreation (PPR) would be free to focus on public space deficiencies in other areas of the city.
- Additional activities arising from the organization’s management of the park could provide an additional revenue stream for PPR.

Outcomes and Assessment

To determine the plan’s effectiveness, and to establish a metric of success over time, Watermark Planning recommends assessing outcomes through measurable data. BPS or a private non-profit entity should oversee a regular assessment of benchmarks to measure progress in implementing the plan’s recommendations.

Watermark Planning offers three recommendations to jumpstart the process of activating Waterfront Park today:
- The City of Portland should create a non-profit entity to manage waterfront projects;
- Tactical urbanism should be employed to get low-cost projects off the ground and bring changes to the park as quickly as possible;
- Portland should undertake a catalytic project to transform its downtown waterfront.
1 INTRODUCTION

Realizing a 21st Century Urban Waterfront in Portland’s Central City
INTRODUCTION

Why this plan? Why Now?

In the 1970s, Portland was ahead of its time when it removed Harbor Drive and replaced it with Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park. In the years since, the city has fallen behind in terms of planning and building a successful urban riverfront. While other cities have redeveloped their downtown waterfronts to spur economic development and create dynamic spaces that celebrate unique cultural, natural, and historical elements within the region, Portland continues to lag behind in this regard.

Due to the park’s disconnect from the river and downtown as well as a lack of amenities and commercial attractions, Waterfront Park has not realized its full potential as a 21st century urban waterfront. With Central City 2035 and The River Plan/Central Reach planning processes underway, now is the ideal time to prioritize turning Portland’s central city waterfront into the true regional amenity that has been envisioned repeatedly over the past four decades.

How will this plan be used?

This document is an activation strategy for revitalizing the Central City’s westside waterfront. It harnesses ideas from prior City plans and current City planning efforts while also drawing upon public input and international best practices to highlight opportunities for activating Portland’s waterfront. This plan will inform the Central City 2035 Plan and the Central Reach portion of The River Plan and will also be used to inform a future update to the 2003 Waterfront Park Master Plan.

Who created this plan?

Watermark Planning is a team of six graduate students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning (MURP) program at Portland State University’s Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning. In fulfillment of the degree capstone, Planning Workshop, the team has partnered with the City of Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability and other agencies, including Portland Parks and Recreation, to develop a Downtown Portland Waterfront Activation Strategy.

Geographic Extent

Watermark Planning focused specifically on the west bank of the Willamette River, from the Hawthorne Bowl in the south to the Steel Bridge in the north, encompassing the whole of Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park and beyond into adjacent portions of downtown and Old Town/Chinatown (from Naito Parkway to 3rd Avenue to the west).

The planning team considered a broader area of influence beyond the immediate study area that includes downtown and Old Town/Chinatown and extends westward from Waterfront Park to the Park Blocks, northward to Centennial Mills/Pearl District, and southward to the South Waterfront. The area of influence also included the eastern bank of the Willamette, from the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry in the south to the Rose Quarter in the north.
INTRODUCTION

Downtown Portland Waterfront Activation Strategy: Area of Focus
Portland’s downtown waterfront has an intriguing and multilayered story that is poorly represented within Waterfront Park. Connecting park visitors with the historic and cultural context of the river would build a sense of place and promote the park as a unique destination for residents and visitors alike. Four key stages of waterfront history that should be highlighted and prominently displayed in the park are described here.
Pre-settlement and Early City-building

The Portland area was home to a number of traditional villages, most notably of the Multnomah bands of the Chinook linguistic stock but also included the Kalapuya, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Molalla and more. The waterfront around what today is Portland’s downtown was a swampy backwater used by local tribes to harvest the wappato, a root serving as a staple food. Population estimates from the mid-18th century put the Multnomah tribe at around 3600 people, mostly populating the area around the confluence of the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. The Oregon Donation Land Act of 1850 and following legislation removed local tribes from the area, opening it to the land claims of white settlers. The 1910 Portland census put the entire Chinook population at a mere 315.

Early settlers used the Portland area, known then as “the Clearing,” as a stopping ground and trading area between the settlers around Oregon City and Fort Vancouver. Asa Lovejoy and William Overton laid the first major claim to the area, encompassing 640 acres, that includes what today is Tom McCall Waterfront Park. The city, despite its potential, was at the time very much a frontier town, given the derisive name “Stumptown” by outsiders (and rivals in nearby Oregon City and Milwaukie) for the numerous tree stumps left in the ground in the middle of Front and First streets.

Working Waterfront

Portland grew to be the Pacific Northwest’s major port during the 19th century, largely supporting the needs of the California Gold Rush and exporting wheat, lumber and fish to the rapidly growing city of San Francisco. Plank roads directly connected the downtown wharves to the rich resource lands to the west and south. Ships headed for southern and international destinations pulled up to buildings located right on the river to load their goods. City streets ran directly to the water’s edge and residents would stroll down to the riverfront to watch waterfront activity.

Following the success of the 1905 Lewis and Clark fair, the first Rose Festival was held in 1907 to celebrate the civic pride of a quickly growing city. The riverfront remained a center of commerce and activity, however, with thousands of ships calling on the city annually, shipping lumber and wheat to markets in Europe, Asia and the eastern U.S. During this period, the city began engaging in early forms of planning and in 1929 completed the seawall and an associated sewer line that remain today.
The City of Steel: Cars and Ships Come to Portland

At one point in the 1930s, proud city residents claimed that Portland had more cars per capita than New York or Chicago, and the city actively promoted itself as a car-friendly city. Shipbuilding soon followed the access to cheap hydropower and numerous steel manufacturers.

When the US joined the Second World War, the city drew in thousands of workers to build ships in one of the great industrial war efforts in the nation. To meet the need of linking downtown with the shipyards in the north, the city began construction of the Harbor Drive expressway. The downtown waterfront became an important area for merchant ships staging supplies and cargo and for completing repairs of war-damaged ships.

The Waterfront as Open Space

In one of the great riverfront stories of the 20th century, Harbor Drive was removed in 1974 and replaced with Tom McCall Waterfront Park. The downtown riverfront has seen only incremental and small-scale additions since par completion in 1978. Today, the park is much as it was at its opening in 1978 and remains a great attraction for locals and visitors alike. During this period, a number of planning efforts had targeted the waterfront for updates. However, most visions remain unmet and the park remains an open grassy area much as originally designed. The 1972 called for “several large grassy areas shall be left primarily as open grass “meadows” to provide space for unspecified Park uses and future flexibility.”
Despite longstanding ambitions and multiple planning efforts, Portland’s goal of embracing and enhancing the Willamette River as the heart of the Central City has only been partially fulfilled. Lacking implementation, many proposals for the downtown waterfront have repeatedly appeared in official planning documents over the past four decades. Many of those recommendations remain relevant today and continue to represent viable strategies for activating the downtown waterfront.
DOWNTOWN WATERFRONT’S DEFINING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS & GUIDING VISION DOCUMENTS

- **Steel Bridge Completed**
- **Hawthorne Bridge completed**
- **Westside Wharves Demolished; Seawall Construction Begins**
- **Westside wharves and warehouses**
- **Seawall completed**
  
  Also shown here is the newly-constructed Burnside Bridge, completed in 1926.
- **Harbor Drive (99W) opens**
- **Morrison Bridge (#3) completed**
- **John Yeon’s Visitor Information Center constructed**
- **Harbor Drive becomes obsolete after the opening of the new Interstate 5 freeway**
- **Harbor Drive (99W) opens**
- **Morrison Bridge (#3) completed**
- **John Yeon’s Visitor Information Center constructed**
- **Harbor Drive becomes obsolete after the opening of the new Interstate 5 freeway**
Downtown Plan adopted 1972

Harbor Drive removed 1974

Waterfront Park dedicated 1975

Central City Plan adopted 1978

Japanese-American Historical Plaza completed 1988

Waterfront Park Master Plan adopted 1990

River Renaissance Strategy adopted 2003

Bill Naito Legacy Plaza completed 2004

Salmon Street Springs completed 2006

Waterfront Park Master Plan adopted 2009

The River Plan: River Concept adopted 2012

Central City 2035 Concept Plan adopted

Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report adopted
This section summarizes over forty years of planning history in Portland as it relates directly to Tom McCall Waterfront Park and pertains to the following plans:

1972 - Portland Downtown Plan
1975 - Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report
1988 - Central City Plan
2003 - Waterfront Park Master Plan
2004 - River Renaissance Strategy
2006 - The River Plan: River Concept
2012 - Central City 2035 Concept Plan

A list of proposals mentioned consistently within these plans is included at the end of this section.

### 1972: Portland Downtown Plan

The Portland Downtown Plan, adopted by City Council in 1972, was a groundbreaking comprehensive plan for the area of the Central City bound by I-5 and I-405, including the westside waterfront. Goals developed for the downtown waterfront and included in this plan were heavily influenced by input from a citizen advisory committee as well as several planning studies conducted by Portland Planning Commission staff in the late 1960s, including the 1967 Eastern Waterfront Staff Study. The Downtown Plan set the primary framework and a series of guiding principles for the 1975 Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report, which ultimately created the public open space known today as Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park.

### 1975: Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report

The Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report, adopted by City Council in August 1975, was the culmination of a formal planning process that began in 1971, immediately following the decision to remove Harbor Drive (Highway 99) from the west bank of the Willamette River in order to create a grand, new open space in the heart of the Central City. The Final Report focused on a set of policy recommendations for the implementation of a three-year plan for the newly created Waterfront Park. These policy recommendations were rooted in a series of planning guidelines outlined in the 1972 Portland Downtown Plan, as well as in the goals and objectives of the 1974 Waterfront Renewal Plan. With a few major exceptions, particularly those focused on pedestrian improvements and traffic calming along Naito Parkway and commercial development at the Morrison Bridgehead, many of the recommendations made in the Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report, especially those related to park design, have been implemented over the last 35 years. This visionary plan was responsible, more or less, for shaping the open space known as Governor Tom McCall Waterfront Park as it exists today.

"The riverfront is one of the few places which provides the city dweller with the opportunity to get in touch with the natural environment, and more particularly with the special qualities of a body of water. It provides the opportunity for play as well as work, relaxation as well as stimulation, nature as well as artifice; the opportunity to create for the people of Portland a combination of unique activities through which city life can be enhanced."

-Portland Downtown Plan, 1972

"The removal of the last major obstacles, the Old Journal Building and Harbor Drive, has turned an elusive possibility into an exciting reality. What the people of Portland have anticipated for over sixty years and ten unexecuted plans can now be accomplished, almost overnight – a major Waterfront Park in Downtown Portland."

-Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report, 1975
40 YEARS OF PLANNING PORTLAND’S “FRONT YARD”

1988
Central City Plan

The Central City Plan, officially adopted by the Portland City Council in 1988, built upon the 1972 Portland Downtown Plan and the 1980 update to that plan. The 1988 Central City planning process incorporated input from more than 10,000 Portland residents, making it the most extensive public involvement process of any planning effort in the region during the 1980s. The plan provided a 20-year guide for growth and investment in Portland’s Central City and identifies the waterfront as a significant asset to be leveraged in this process. Although the plan was concerned with a broader area than just the area in and around Tom McCall Waterfront Park, it highlighted the Willamette River as a central feature of Portland. Within this plan a theme emerged in the language used to describe the significance of the Willamette River in the Central City; namely, the river was repeatedly referred to as a “focal point” for activities, recreational or commercial, that “knit” the city together.

2003
Waterfront Park Master Plan

The Waterfront Park Master Plan was created as an update to the original Downtown Waterfront Park Final Report master plan from 1975. Its purpose is to provide a clear direction for the future of the park through a series of policies, development concepts, specific projects, and actions. In addition to outlining a number of physical improvements, it includes policy and program recommendations. The plan is quite thorough and incorporates a great deal of public input. However, while it includes sections devoted to implementation, funding, and phasing, to date it has largely failed to be implemented.

One element of the plan that remains relevant today is feedback from a 2001 focus group with the public that identified what was working and what needed improvement in the park. The group noted a need for more linkages to the downtown, increased river access, and a need for more historic and environmental features. Problems cited included limited pedestrian crossings, poor directional signage, and poor connections to the bridges for pedestrians and bikers, all of which remain issues today. Although the Waterfront Park Master Plan recommended a phased schedule of implementation and included cost estimates for each section of the park as well as a discussion of potential funding sources—presumably in an attempt to think creatively and also strategically about financing implementation—an overall lack of funding seems to be the root cause of failed implementation of the plan’s many viable recommendations.

Key goals from the plan

Master Plan Guiding Principles

- Integrate and connect the park with its surrounding city center location.
- Accentuate the riverfront location of the park.
- Create an environment for diverse activity and expanded recreational opportunities.

“T he ultimate goals of the Master Plan are simple—to bring greater enrichment to those who live, work, and seek recreation in downtown Portland, Oregon; to bring people together; to generate more life in the park; and to strengthen its connection to the downtown. These ideas were a part of the 1975 plan and they remain powerful and compelling notions. Much has changed in the city since then however, and a fresh approach to achieving these goals has to be defined. The new concept maintains the park—as it was stated in the original plan—as a “prime recreation resource particularly for those who live, work or shop in downtown.” The Master Plan reiterates another goal from the previous plan to provide a “strong formal framework for all present and future elements…urban in character, harmonious with the order and form of the downtown, and capable of handling large community activities…”

-Waterfront Park Master Plan, 2003
Major Development Concepts

- Develop two major activity centers in the park, between the Hawthorne Bridge and Salmon Street Springs and at Ankeny Plaza.
- Redevelop and improve the large lawn area north of the Morrison Bridge as the Meadow.
- Develop an all-weather Waterfront Plaza in the vicinity of Yamhill and Morrison Streets, bordered by the new curved pathway.
- Expand opportunities to experience the park by developing the Promenade as a curved pathway that meanders through the park.
- Increase opportunities for the general public to view and have closer access to the river.
- Integrate the Esplanade with downtown pedestrian corridors and other regional greenway trails.
- Create stronger pedestrian and bicycle connections across and along the river, with increased capacity to meet growing contemporary and future needs.
- Develop a long-term strategy to coordinate programs and events, oversee implementation of the Master Plan, and provide overall management of the park’s operations.
- Encourage small-scale activities to provide variety and life in the park.
- Provide a variety of ways for visitors to learn about the park, the river, and the site’s history.
- Integrate public art throughout the park using a variety of media and cultural offerings.
- Integrate permanent public art works into the overall design of the park.
- Use native plants extensively, though not exclusively, to enhance the educational value of the park.

Overall

In consideration of the unique character of the park, establish a permanent entity to work with Portland Parks and Recreation to develop a management plan, create and apply event guidelines, and ensure that the goals of the Master Plan are, and continue to be, fulfilled.

“...a persistent problem for the informal park user has been the proportion of summer months during which much of the park is fenced off for the installation, dismantling, and recovery from major events. It is an objective of the plan to shorten those periods of interruption of park use and limit the area affected.”

- Waterfront Park Master Plan, 2003

2004

River Renaissance Strategy

The River Renaissance Strategy was approved by the Portland City Council in 2004, preceded by the River Renaissance Vision from 2001. More than 1,000 Portland residents contributed their ideas and insights to the development of the Vision, which is intended to be a guiding document for river planning over the next 50 years. The strategy focuses on five main river-related topics: a clean and healthy river; a prosperous and working harbor; Portland’s “front yard”; vibrant waterfront districts and neighborhoods; and partnerships, leadership, and education. Within each of these five topics, the strategy outlines guiding policies, metrics of success, and examples of current or potential actions recommended to achieve the desired outcomes. A major strength of the River Renaissance Strategy is its incorporation of real world examples of successful projects, coupled with a description of mechanisms, both financial and regulatory, for implementing suggested action items.

2006

The River Plan: River Concept

The purpose of the River Concept plan was to provide policy guidance for the update of the 1987 Willamette Greenway Plan through the development of a new river plan. The River Concept was part of the River Renaissance initiative that began in 2001. The River Plan, which came out of the River Concept, serves to identify projects to include on its Capital Improvement Program list as well as those that would be best implemented through public-private partnerships. The Central Reach portion of the Willamette River was envisioned as the region’s gathering place within the River Concept.
2012
Central City 2035 Concept Plan

The Central City 2035 Concept Plan forms Phase II of the Central City 2035 Plan (CC2035), for which the planning process is currently in progress, and is scheduled to be completed in 2015. CC2035 builds upon the 1972 Portland Downtown Plan and the 1988 Central City Plan and operates within the framework of the recently adopted Portland Plan. CC2035 establishes high-level policy guidance for development in the city center and relates the center’s development to the four quadrants in the Central City. Central City 2035 spans both sides of the Willamette River, including Portland’s downtown and adjacent neighborhoods on the west (West Quadrant), the Central Eastside Industrial District (Southeast Quadrant), and the Lloyd District and Lower Albina (N/NE Quadrant). Plans for the quadrants form Phase III of CC2035 (2010-present). Phase IV of the CC2035 will consist of refining the concept plan and will focus on implementation.

Of particular relevance to Watermark Planning’s Downtown Portland Waterfront Activation Strategy planning process are CC2035 concept plan goals related to the Willamette River, specifically increasing its role in the city, improving its health, and increasing public access to and along the river. Similarly, the concept plan’s urban design goals include emphasizing the river’s status as the “defining feature” of the Central City, improving the built environment bordering it, capitalizing upon river vistas, and improving east-west connections. Other urban design goals include bridgehead redevelopment, improving street diversity, open spaces that serve a wide variety of uses and users, and harnessing the architectural and historic value of buildings and places, and establishing transitions between neighborhoods.

In Summary: 1972-2012

The following list and the matrix on page 27 contain goals common to the aforementioned planning documents from the last four decades:

- Expanded retail core oriented toward the waterfront
- Commercial-recreational activities and commercial uses (shops, restaurants, entertainment) along the waterfront and in the park
- Study/consider potential for active uses under bridge ramps
- Tourist, civic, and cultural functions such as an aquarium, marine museum, amphitheater, botanical garden, or amusement-recreation center in Waterfront Park
- A restaurant/shop complex located at the Morrison Bridgehead
- Convert old Visitor Information Center to an appropriate use such as a restaurant or community center
- More housing near the waterfront
- Elimination of traffic barriers between the river and adjoining districts
- Increased pedestrian access, and access for those with mobility impairments, along the waterfront and to/from adjacent districts and/or bridges
- Attractive pedestrian spaces achieved through establishing design standards for seating, plazas, and walkways
- Traffic-free pedestrian and bike connections to Old Town/Skidmore Fountain, Retail Core, and other districts adjacent to the waterfront
- Specially designed paved crosswalks with appropriate signalization on Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] to minimize it as a pedestrian barrier
- Close sections of Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] to provide traffic-free access to the waterfront
- Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] shall become a tree-lined boulevard, with tree patterns extended west toward the Downtown on major pedestrian streets
- Increased pedestrian-bicycle circulation along the waterfront
- Separated bicycle path or lane where space permits, which connects with existing and proposed bicycle paths
- Placemaking elements (landscaping, lighting, connections) which emphasize visual and physical ties between the waterfront and the downtown
- Expanded access to the river
- Places for people to observe river activities and scenic views (e.g. floating platform)
- Activities on the water such as boat tours, pleasure boating, and “barge concerts” with supporting dock facilities
- Establish facilities that access the water’s surface (e.g. temporary boat tie-ups, swimming areas, a light craft center, and moorages)
- Improved links/access between east and west (e.g. shuttle transit between waterfront and the retail core)
• Provide north-south transit along the waterfront by “trolley” or other “fun vehicles”
• River taxi or ferry system with stops at public attractions and existing piers
• More public restrooms at the waterfront
• Enhance fish and wildlife habitat along the river
• Enhance the river as a “focal point” for activities, recreational or commercial, that “knit” the city together
• Create a nonprofit corporation to ensure uninterrupted progress of plans as political and community leaders change

Watermark Planning believes that these recommendations continue to represent viable strategies for activating the downtown waterfront. From a planning perspective, the degree to which these recommendations have recurred consistently in plans related to the waterfront over the past forty years—and yet remain unfulfilled—deserves a closer look. To this end, a later section of this plan has been devoted to a strategic framework for management and implementation.
### Relevant Planning Goals, 1972-Present

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded retail core oriented toward the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commercial-recreational activities and commercial uses (shops, restaurants, entertainment) along the waterfront and in the park</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study/consider potential for active uses under bridge ramps</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourist, civic, and cultural functions such as an aquarium, marine museum, amphitheater, botanical garden, or amusement-recreation center in Waterfront Park</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>A restaurant/shop complex at the Morrison Bridgehead</td>
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<td>Convert old Visitor Information Center to an appropriate use such as a restaurant or community center</td>
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<td>More housing near the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elimination of traffic barriers between the river and adjoining districts</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased pedestrian access, and access for those with mobility impairments, along the waterfront and to/from adjacent districts and/or bridges</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attractive pedestrian spaces achieved through establishing design standards for seating, plazas, and walkways</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traffic-free pedestrian and bike connections to Old Town/Skidmore Fountain, Retail Core, and other districts adjacent to the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specially designed paved crosswalks with appropriate signalization on Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] to minimize it as a pedestrian barrier</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Close sections of Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] to provide traffic-free access to the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Front Avenue [Naito Parkway] tree patterns extended west toward the downtown on major pedestrian streets</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased pedestrian-bicycle circulation along the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Separated bicycle path or lane where space permits, which connects with existing and proposed bicycle paths</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Placemaking elements (landscaping, lighting, connections) which emphasize visual and physical ties between the waterfront and the downtown</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanded access to the river</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places for people to observe river activities and scenic views (e.g. floating platform)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Activities on the water such as boat tours, pleasure boating, and “barge concerts” with supporting dock facilities</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Establish facilities that access the water’s surface (e.g. temporary boat tie-ups, swimming areas, a light craft center, and moorages)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved links/access between east and west (e.g. shuttle transit between waterfront and the retail core)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide north-south transit along the waterfront by “trolley” or other “fun vehicles”</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>River taxi or ferry system with stops at public attractions and existing piers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>More public restrooms at the waterfront</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enhance fish and wildlife habitat along the river</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a nonprofit corporation to ensure uninterrupted progress of plans as political and community leaders change</td>
<td>X</td>
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40 Years of Planning Portland’s “Front Yard”
A number of factors prevent Waterfront Park from becoming a 21st century waterfront, including limited access to the Willamette River, limited boating options, an imbalance between natural and human elements, insufficient amenities such as food and seating, and restrictions on public use of the park throughout the prime summer months due to large, ticketed events.
Many of the same goals and aspirations related to activating the downtown waterfront have consistently appeared in official planning documents since the 1970s. Lacking implementation, and despite longstanding ambitions and decades of planning focus, efforts to embrace and enhance the Willamette River as the heart of Portland’s Central City have only partially been realized. Thus the same issues that were identified within the park and surrounding blocks in the 1988 Central City Plan, and again in the 2003 Waterfront Park Master Plan largely persist. Popular consensus, gleaned from public feedback gathered throughout the last four decades of Waterfront Park’s existence, indicates that the park is a beloved but underutilized public space that needs an update.

After analyzing current conditions in and around Tom McCall Waterfront Park, Watermark Planning identified a series of key issues and concerns, which were sorted into the following general categories:

- Placemaking
- Access & Circulation
- Commercial & Recreational Boating
- Economic Development
- Natural Environment
- Events

In the following paragraphs, each category of issues and concerns is presented.

**Placemaking**

While in many respects Portland’s Waterfront Park is seen as a regional asset and is the site of various large-scale gatherings and special events throughout the year, it does not feel like an everyday destination. According to survey results, most people visiting the park on at least a semi-regular basis are only passing through on their way somewhere else. A lack of regular programming, amenities, and services, both within the park and nearby, provides visitors with little reason to stop and spend additional time there. Survey respondents indicated a strong desire for ample seating and food options within the park. For many years, planning efforts have attempted to highlight and distinguish Waterfront Park as Portland’s “front yard,” as a complementary public space to Pioneer Courthouse Square, known affectionately as Portland’s “living room.” Currently, however, the waterfront feels disconnected from downtown and provides users with few clues to the site’s unique historical and geographical context, making it difficult for one to gain a clear “sense of place.”

**Access & Circulation**

The seawall fronting Tom McCall Waterfront Park is currently used on an infrequent basis for docking larger vessels. Outside of the Portland Spirit River Cruises, there are no boats that call the downtown riverfront their home port. A few key issues and challenges drive the lack of commercial boating operations in Portland’s downtown. First, the zoning code currently does not allow overnight mooring as
an outright use, forcing commercial boat operators into costly conditional use permits. In addition, services needed for commercial boating, such as utilities, waste disposal systems and seating areas for passengers, are not currently available in the Central Reach, and limited opportunities exist for private development of these services due to a lack of developable riverfront land and the conflict between a publically accessible greenway and the need for restricted access of commercial facilities. Successful commercial operations also require staging and ticketing areas for passengers and amenities, such as can be found in a train station.

Despite an increase in on-water recreation, there remains a disconnect between recreational boaters and Waterfront Park. There are a number of publically accessible docks within the Central Reach, but only one, along Riverplace Marina, is open to the public at Waterfront Park. Current docks are either poorly maintained and unusable (Ankeny Dock) or not located in areas with ready access to downtown (Duckworth Dock, Cathedral Park). Federal constraints on new dock placement require creative use of existing facilities. Riverplace offers an opportunity but is privately operated and already experiences space conflicts at its public dock. There is also a lack of permanent mooring spots in key locations, especially around the Hawthorne Bowl and Ross Island, which can lead to degradation of shallow water habitat.

Commercial & Recreational Boating

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conflict between a publicly accessible greenway and the need for restricted access of commercial facilities. Successful commercial operations also require staging and ticketing areas for passengers and amenities, such as can be found in a train station. Despite an increase in on-water recreation, there remains a disconnect between recreational boaters and Waterfront Park. There are a number of publicly accessible docks within the Central Reach, but only one, along Riverplace Marina, is open to the public at Waterfront Park. Current docks are either poorly maintained and unusable (Ankeny Dock) or not located in areas with ready access to downtown (Duckworth Dock, Cathedral Park). Federal constraints on new dock placement require creative use of existing facilities. Riverplace offers an opportunity but is privately operated and already experiences space conflicts at its public dock. There is also a lack of permanent mooring spots in key locations, especially around the Hawthorne Bowl and Ross Island, which can lead to degradation of shallow water habitat.

Economic Development

Currently Waterfront Park offers little in the way of food, drink, and other commercial attractions. To be clear, Waterfront Park is a public, open space and should be preserved as such. With the exception of Saturday Market, however, the scarcity of commercial activities in and around the park limits the area’s functionality as well as its attractiveness to a more diverse range of users. There is likely foregone revenue from permitting and use agreements in the park that could be leveraged to finance park improvements and ongoing maintenance. Additionally, the adjacent urban edge, Naito Parkway, and the 1st through 3rd Avenue blocks provide little in the way of options to supplement the lack of commercial attractions in the park. Overall, there is significant unrealized potential, and likely substantial foregone revenue, both private and public, as the result of underdevelopment in the park and surrounding blocks.

Natural Environment

As the interface between the Willamette River and downtown Portland, Waterfront Park functions as a buffer between the built and natural environments. While an urban park designed for human access and use, the park is also important for avian and pollinator species that currently suffer from habitat fragmentation. There are very few areas of native plant species that can support wildlife and the few clusters of native plantings that do exist are largely piecemeal and do not engage park users in any meaningful way.
The balance between natural systems preservation and human access is most challenging in and around the Hawthorne Bowl. There are two key issues within the Bowl. The shallow water in the cove offers the only downtown westside habitat for migrating juvenile salmonids for over a mile while; it also is the only readily available direct access point into the river for boaters and swimmers. Federal regulations and our numerous Endangered Species Act listings require a prioritization of habitat improvement over human access. Future planning and design efforts focused on the Bowl will need to separate these competing uses of the river. Human access to the Bowl also suffers from an abundance of resident geese that cover the grassy areas in excrement. Many cities around the world are struggling with this same challenge, and a number of humane tools exist for making the Bowl less attractive as a place for the geese to reside.

Events

Tom McCall Waterfront Park serves as the site of choice for various large, ticketed and fenced events. While such events serve as popular attractions for the region’s residents and out-of-town visitors, the events’ presence and reach may be out of balance with what Portland residents and visitors desire for the waterfront. It can be argued that the park’s status as a public space is called into question when much of it is fenced-off to the (non-ticket holding) public during the most heavily used times of the year. As most event-days fall during periods of comparatively sunny weather, this means that the public space is least accessible to the public during the time of year that the park would be used the most. Set-up and teardown further restrict access to the park’s open spaces on non-event days. The events impose a physical toll upon the park’s natural environment, and significant costs are associated with replanting the grass after event use. Furthermore, event fences and large tents create a physical barrier in the park. By restricting visitors’ movements, these barriers exacerbate existing circulation problems within the park. Finally, the fact that there are more than 60 days during prime weather months in which the public must pay to enjoy the park, a public good, raises important equity concerns.

Summary of Challenges

Portland’s downtown waterfront lacks vibrancy, largely as the result of difficult or unclear connections to the city’s downtown and surrounding neighborhoods, as well as a lack of commercial activities and attractions in and around the park. There are often conflicts between modes, particularly pedestrians and cyclists, along the park’s very popular and limited pathways. In addition, there are few opportunities for commercial and recreational boating in Waterfront Park as well as opportunities for park visitors to engage directly with the river. Furthermore, a better balance between natural and human elements in the park—including native vegetation, geese, shallow water salmon habitat, and people—is desired. Finally, public use of the park, a regional amenity, is restricted during summer months due to the dedication of a large swath of the park for limited access events. Overall, the implementation of goals targeted at addressing many of these issues over recent years has been hampered by City fiscal constraints.
Throughout a four-month community engagement process that collected over 800 unique comments, the public and stakeholders told Watermark Planning that Waterfront Park could begin to live up to its unmet potential by providing greater access to the water, more amenities, improved pathways, and a better balance between daily park users and festivals.
Introduction

During a four-month community engagement process involving multiple surveys and outreach events, over 30 stakeholder interviews, a mapping application designed in-house, and the use of social media, Watermark Planning solicited the public’s input on how best to activate Waterfront Park and transform it into a world-class space. Some key themes to emerge from respondents’ comments were the following:

- the park does not live up to its full potential as a treasured Portland asset;
- there is a strong but unmet desire to gain greater access to the Willamette River via the park for swimming, boating and watersports;
- the boating community wants better access to the park and downtown from the river;
- certain additional amenities (in particular, food and seating) must be present for the park become a more multipurpose and vibrant space year-round;
- the experience of walking and cycling both within and to the park should be enhanced; and
- there is a frustration with the presence of large events’ use of the park space.

The most important findings will be discussed in the following section. For a more detailed discussion of the community engagement process, the surveys, and feedback from stakeholders, please see Appendix A.

Surveys

Watermark Planning conducted three unique surveys over the five-month planning process. The planning team designed an intercept survey targeting event attendees, a longer online survey targeting the general population, and a survey tailored to solicit feedback from downtown business owners.

Survey Results

A brief summary of the survey results follows. To review a complete copy of the surveys conducted and responses received, please see the Community Engagement Supplement.

Characteristics of Park Use

The online survey provided multiple opportunities for respondents to write in additional comments. Several recurrent themes were apparent once these comments were compiled and reviewed. First, when asked to describe the park (“Waterfront Park is...”), the single-most frequent response is to describe the park in unqualified positive terms (27%). Some of the most commonly used words were “asset,” “treasure,” or “amenity.” While hardly a surprising finding, this clearly demonstrates that Waterfront Park is a beloved location to many residents and visitors. Interestingly, however, in the next most frequent cluster of comments (13%), respondents coupled a positive expression with a complaint or concern. In these respondents’ views, Waterfront Park is “great but” has real problems that inhibit visitors’ enjoyment of the site. Nearly an equal percentage
of comments (11%) describe Waterfront Park as a place which is not all that it can be; instead, it has “potential” or is “underutilized.” The fourth most common write-in comment for this question (8%) was to express concerns about pedestrians’ and cyclists’ ability to move through and access the park. Pedestrian-bicycle conflicts in the park were called out in multiple comments.

Barriers to Visiting the Park

Both the online and intercept surveys allowed respondents to provide a write-in response to regarding other barriers to visiting the park. Write-in answers supplied most frequently included: a lack of comfort when walking or cycling along the path; difficulty in accessing the park via foot or bicycle; the large, transient population in the park; insufficient parking; too few toilets; limited seating; and the weather.

What Would Make the Park More Usable

Park users consider water access and food options to be valuable amenities that are lacking in Waterfront Park. Both the intercept and online survey respondents considered “more access to the water” to be the key change that would make the park most usable.
Businesses were asked a similar question about park usability, specifically focusing on “what additional features would benefit” their business. While the same options were offered, 75% of businesses indicated that “better police presence” was the feature that would most benefit them. Businesses responses also showed that they value the presence of other food service businesses nearby.

Portland Parks and Recreation, which conducted a survey on park usage in 2001, asked a similar question. They received similar responses, with more than 20% indicating that “better access to the river” and “more places to eat” would make Waterfront Park “truly great.”

In Watermark Planning’s survey, respondents were also able to write-in a response to this question. The largest category of write-in comments (43%) focused on improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists, with the vast majority calling for separated bike and pedestrian movement.

Naito Parkway

The online survey provided an option for respondents to write in their opinion regarding “what would make Naito Parkway an attractive destination for both Portland residents and visitors.” Interestingly, while the question was open-ended, nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) chose to address transportation questions and made suggestions such as improving pedestrian and bicycle crossings, adding sidewalks, traffic calming, and lane reductions.
The remaining comments focused on placemaking and additional amenities (20%) and only 16% focused on commercial solutions like sidewalk cafes and additional street-level retail uses. This may reveal that, at least according to the public, a prime barrier to commercial activity along Naito is not as much a matter of commercial development but actually one of roadway design.

When asked to explain these proposed clusters, respondents frequently emphasizing the need to capitalize upon entertainment and water access opportunities in the Hawthorne Bowl and to take advantage of existing or planned future activities, such as encouraging activity near the future James Beard Public Market and the Morrison Bridge.

Waterfront Plaza is defined as the park area between the Hawthorne and Morrison Bridges and the Meadow as the park area between the Morrison Bridge and just north of SW Ash Street.

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Most survey respondents indicated that they live in the Portland Metro area (97% in the online survey and 77% in the intercept survey). The greater representation of visitors in the intercept survey is not surprising, given that these surveys were conducted during Shamrock Run and Saturday Market. Of those respondents who live in the Portland Metro area, the largest group of respondents (in both the online and intercept surveys) live on Portland’s east side west of 82nd Avenue.
composition of the surveys is that the percentage of non-white respondents was much higher in the intercept survey (29% compared with 11% in the online survey). This finding speaks to the importance of deliberately conducting community engagement activities in a range of locations in order to reach a more diverse audience. When gathering input about a public space such as a park, engaging with park users on-site represents an invaluable opportunity to reach people who may not typically be involved in the planning process.

Online Map Application

Watermark Planning designed an online map application that enabled viewers to provide location-specific comments on a base map showing the waterfront area. Of the more than 50 unique comments recorded, the majority (55%) were directed toward circulation or access issues in or near Waterfront Park. The remaining comments focused on economic development (17%), boating (9%), natural environment (6%), or an aspect of placemaking (6%).

Interviews

The Watermark Planning team conducted in-person interviews with over 30 members of the community, including downtown business owners, members of the boating community, representatives of cultural and heritage associations, representatives of environmental organizations, representatives of festivals and tourism groups, and advocates in the areas of active transportation and accessibility. Because many of the interviewees have been engaged for years, or even decades, on issues concerning the Willamette River, Waterfront Park, or downtown neighborhoods or businesses, these interviews complemented survey efforts by offering a more nuanced and long-range picture of successes and challenges. Early in the process, the team also reached out to local experts in the field of public outreach to solicit feedback on the engagement process. In addition, Watermark contacted planners in several other cities to better inform the case studies being developed. Many insights shared during interviews served to inform Watermark Planning’s final recommendations. See Appendix A for interview summaries.

Summary

The Watermark Planning team found that there is great value in engaging with park visitors on location within the park. Experiences during both Saturday Market and “A Day in the Park,” where non-white, non-native-English-speaking families with small children were active participants, demonstrated that such events can provide an opportunity to interact with people who, as users of this public amenity, are deeply affected by park planning issues but often remain under-engaged in the public planning process. They may not necessarily be able to attend public meetings because of language barriers, family obligations, or childcare but may be able to participate in an informal setting in a location that they already frequent. In order to reach a more diverse audience, Watermark Planning urges the City to consider hosting similar events on-site in Waterfront Park.
Successful waterfronts have innovative management organizations, are destinations, have a diversity of spaces and programming, and use placemaking to create truly special places.
21st Century U.S. Riverfronts

Introduction

Watermark Planning studied examples of successful waterfront development projects across the United States to discover what made those waterfronts vibrant places. In selecting these cities, Watermark Planning identified urban waterfronts with similar river sizes to the Willamette, similar population size and density, and a number of characteristics or features shared with Portland’s waterfront. Based on these criteria, Watermark Planning chose to study waterfronts in Boston, MA; Columbus, OH; Louisville, KY; and Pittsburgh, PA.

Boston, Massachusetts

Charles River

In 1997 the Metropolitan District Council (MDC), managers of the Charles River Basin since its completion in 1910, began developing the first master plan for the Basin in over 60 years. The Charles River Basin Master Plan, completed in 2002, is intended to be a guide for management, planning, and design decisions. It emerged from an extensive public process that occurred over approximately two years. The plan’s timeframe anticipates implementation over a 5- to 15-year period. Its final section includes detailed inventories, existing conditions reports, and recommendations for the thirty distinct project areas in the Basin, one of which is the Esplanade.

The Charles River Esplanade was originally created between 1903 and 1910 in conjunction with the Charles River Dam to serve as a promenade on a narrow strip of parkland between the seawall and an alley running along the backyards of Beacon Street residences. With the construction of Storrow Drive in 1950-51, the Esplanade’s parkland was significantly reduced in size. As a stipulation, all parkland that was lost due to the construction of Storrow Drive had to be replaced by newly created land; an island and a series of lagoons were then constructed in the Basin, which continue to be popular with non-motorized boaters. As currently defined, the Esplanade consists of an approximately 1.2-mile stretch of parkland abutting Storrow Drive between the Longfellow Bridge and the Harvard Bridge. Water quality in the once heavily polluted Basin has improved dramatically in recent years, attracting people back to the river and creating improved habitat for wildlife.

Key Goals

- Establish a guide for management, planning, and design decisions in the Charles River Basin after a 60 year absence of any such plan
- Engage and mobilize a broad base of public support within the planning and implementation processes
- Implement recommendations over a 5-15 year period

Challenges and Issues

- The basin is showing signs of wear after a century of use. Factors that have contributed to this deterioration include decades of underfunding, reduced park staffing, and deferred maintenance.

"The vision for a renewed Charles River Basin cannot become a reality without substantially greater financial support from the Commonwealth, private partners, and basic users. The MDC cannot do this work alone...Careful weaving of public and private investment can accomplish the ambitious renewal strategies of this Master Plan."

-Charles River Basin Master Plan, 2002
• There is a recognized need to manage large events that occur at the Hatch Shell (outdoor amphitheatre) and especially to mitigate turf wear that is the direct result frequent events
• Need to manage pedestrian/cyclist conflicts and congestion issues on busy pathways within the park
• Very busy road (Storrow Drive) that serves as a barrier directly abutting parkspace
• Ongoing maintenance and operations shortfalls due to lack of funding and reduction of staff
• Need for improved public safety
• Need for increased vegetation management
• Limited staff resources
• Limited stakeholder coordination
• Desire to upgrade visitor experience and enhance recreational opportunities.

Strategies and Solutions

• Manage the scope and nature of special events on the Esplanade to avoid degradation of the resource and unnecessary impacts on surrounding neighborhoods.
• Establish pedestrian zones that exclude wheeled users, with the intention of establishing a separation of high and low speed traffic and providing safe areas for people who wish to walk along the river. Achieve new pattern through signs, ranger enforcement and changes in pavement at the entrances.
• Eliminate worn grass and replace it with stone dust, pea gravel, or unit pavers in heavily-trafficked areas
• Promote an adopt-a-dock program with local businesses, institutions, and individuals
• Establish a "Basin Council" or similar advocacy group

Characteristics Shared with Portland

• River size and depth
• Bridges
• Seawall
• Presence of major events space
• Very busy road that serves as a barrier directly abutting parkspace
• Limited safe pedestrian access to the Esplanade from the surrounding neighborhoods
• Turf wear as the result of frequent events
• Ongoing maintenance and operations shortfalls due to lack of funding and reduction of staff
• Pedestrian/cyclist conflicts and congestion issues on busy pathways within the park
• Recently improved water quality following a history of heavy pollution.

Signature Features

• The establishment of The Esplanade Association in 2001, a private-partner organization dedicated to restoring and enhancing the Charles River Esplanade, has led to an impressive series of improvements and enhancements to the park, including replacement of benches, dock renovations, launch of a park volunteer program, launch of a goose control program, free summer programming, construction of an esplanade Playspace, and restoration of a memorial, among others.
• Esplanade Playspace (funded by Friends of Esplanade Playspace)
• Eliot Memorial and surrounding landscape and maintenance improvements (funded through public-private partnership with The Esplanade Association)
• Multiple dock replacements (funded through public-private partnerships with The Esplanade Association, Community Boating, and private foundations)
During the latter half of the 20th century, downtown Columbus suffered from the familiar story of central city flight. Density plummeted, and surface parking lots replaced housing to meet the need of a growing commuter culture. Retail disappeared and downtown parks were utilized primarily by employees during the lunch hour. Two major plans provided a series of visions that have guided the redevelopment of the Scioto Riverfront, the “civic heart of Columbus,” since the 1990s: the 1998 Columbus Riverfront Vision Plan and the 2002 Strategic Business Plan for Downtown Columbus. To catalyze the revitalization of the downtown core, Mayor Michael B. Coleman envisioned enhancing the central city’s existing riverfront parks and developing new housing for up to 10,000 residents to create a 24-hour downtown. The final riverfront park plans, focused on key activity centers connected by attractive pedestrian pathways, mirrored the public’s clearly expressed goals of providing “public access to the riverfront” and a “balance of uses.” In 2008, the City of Columbus began construction of the Scioto Mile, a $39 million promenade and park. Between 2000 and 2010, downtown Columbus has seen over $2 billion in public and private investments and a population increase of nearly 5,000 people.

**Key goals**
- Make the riverfront a destination
- Connect parks via pedestrian and bicycle routes
- Develop the riverfront as a cultural spine
- Enhance primary gateways into downtown from the parks through distinct pedestrian streetscaping
- Roadways adjacent to parks shall be parkways and extensions of the open space

**Challenges and Issues**
- Programming
- Sponsorship
- $750,000 annual operating budget for two central riverfront parks

**Strategies and Solutions**
- Park promotion: website (Sciotomile.com)
- Park ambassadors increase presence and provide support
- $20,000,000 in matching private funding
- Private funding champion (American Electric Power Foundation; $10 million matching grant)
- Regularly-occurring, free, family friendly programming
- Street vendors
- City developed cafe and leased out to private entity - provides revenue source
- Housing incentives - 15 year tax abatements
- Increased parking stalls by building structures
- Downtown “people mover” shuttle system and moved parking away from sites adjacent to park
- Riverfront Commons Corporation
- Public nonprofit plays role of economic development agency along riverfront corridor
- Streetscaping with different lighting and signage along primary pedestrian corridors connecting downtown to riverfront

**Characteristics Shared with Portland**
- Seawall/Floodwall
- Redesign and implementation of existing park spaces
- Public anathema to getting into river

**Signature Features**
- Center of Science and Industry (COSI) is on the opposite side of the river from the Scioto Mile. This museum creates a visual connection across the river and provides a civic amenity similar to OMSI in Portland.
- The fountain at Bicentennial Park cost $10 million and is considered the centerpiece of the park. Creative lighting displays provide an evening attraction and activate the park beyond daylight hours. The fountain is integrated with a privately run cafe/restaurant and an amphitheater with a permanent covered stage.
The Performing Arts Pavilion at Bicentennial Park is sponsored by Franklin County and hosts free music, dance, and theatrical performances. The Pavilion also offers rental opportunities for other community events, providing a source of revenue to the City.

A privately run restaurant, Milestone 229, overlooks Bicentennial Park and provides a constant source of activity. The glass-enclosed structure with a covered outdoor dining terrace provides panoramic views of the riverfront and the downtown skyline.
Louisville, Kentucky
Ohio River

In Louisville’s early years, activity centered around the Ohio River, but by the 20th century, the city outgrew its dependence on its wharf and industrial waterfront and most of the land had been abandoned. Interest in redeveloping the waterfront - which had become a blighted area of heavy industry, warehousing, and salvage - began to grow in the 1970s. The Waterfront Development Corporation (WDC) was established in 1986 to plan, coordinate, and implement waterfront revitalization strategies. The WDC, a non-profit public-private partnership, was created by an interlocal agreement between the County, City, and Commonwealth of Kentucky. The WDC created the Louisville Waterfront Master Plan, which was adopted by city ordinance in 1991 to guide the design and development of Waterfront Park and the surrounding Waterfront neighborhood. Phase 1 of the 72-acre Waterfront Park was completed in 1998 and Phase 3 was completed in 2009.

Key goals
• Let the river be a river
• Let the people have green space by the river
• Let the Waterfront design come from the natural ecology of the river’s shore and find its way into the city
• Let the city edge be redesigned to preserve, enhance, and respect the classic grid and density established in the early years of the city as it grew out of the wilderness
• Let the urban force on the one side meet the natural continuum of the Ohio River on the other, in a people-oriented place that attracts active participation
• Let the evolution of Louisville meld the natural setting of the Waterfront with the development needs of a large city

Challenges and Issues
• Land cleanup and acquisition
• Highway was a barrier between the city and the river
• Not much residential use near the riverfront
• Electoral politics prevented continued focus on revitalizing the waterfront

Strategies and Solutions
• Phasing that can respond to funding opportunities as they arise
• Public-private partnership - majority of funding has come from private donors
• Hierarchy of paths and paths separated by modes - bicycle trail separated from pedestrian
• Distinct areas of the park for different activities
• Hardscape areas meant to be gathering spaces and to host festivals
• Encouraged the development of residential uses adjacent to the park to create continuous public activity and constituency for the park that will protect it and be sure it is cared for
• Encouraged the development of retail and office uses in areas adjacent to neighborhood to further reinforce the day long and weekend use of park
• Designed the streets that link the downtown to the park to serve as gateways
• Developed a restaurant in the park and use the lease payments to help fund the operating budget
• WDC maintenance employees are uniformed and help police the park
• Chose an executive director for WDC that was seen as credible both locally and statewide

Characteristics Shared with Portland
• Riverfront park separated from the downtown by a major barrier (highway)
• One of the bigger attractions is the Belle of Louisville, similar to the Portland Spirit
• Strong desire to increase human access to the river
• Summer months are very event-heavy
• City population is approximately the same
• Park is located in the downtown area of the city
Signature Features

- Festival plaza is a 3.5-acre rectangular plaza designed for the vending component of large events. The plaza is surfaced with crushed granite and has bands of concrete running through it where utility hookups are located for concessionaires.
- The Brown-Forman amphitheater accommodates several thousand people on grass risers and the surrounding hillside and features a concrete stage area.
- Tumbleweed Restaurant is located within the park and the lease helps fund the Waterfront Development Corporation’s operating budget.
- Adventure Playground is a play area for children that includes play equipment designed to reflect Louisville’s river heritage and a large waterplay area.
- A “swing garden” offers a place to relax on dozens of large porch-style swings with a view of the river.
- A community boathouse located by the harbor inlet, provides canoeing, kayaking, and rowing opportunities and a site to launch and store boats.

“O ne of the neatest things about this park is that it has been chosen by the community as the central place where people want to be, whether for a college pep rally, health walk, volleyball tournament, a game of bocce ball, or just as a quiet place to read the newspaper. There are no strangers as kids play together in the fountain and play area, and people walking or running in the park smile and nod as they encounter others along the way. The park is often referred to as the “new front door” to the community, and it seems to be the place where everyone starts when they want to show off Louisville to visiting friends or relatives.”

-Project for Public Spaces
21st Century U.S. Riverfronts

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers

Located at the point where the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers join to become the Ohio River, Pittsburgh is in many senses defined by its rivers and its 36 miles of riverfront. After nearly a century and a half of heavy industry centered on iron, glass and steel manufacturing, the decline of the steel industry has allowed Pittsburgh to move beyond its earlier moniker as the Smoky City and descriptions such as “hell with the lid off.” As the industrial legacy and concomitant pollution recedes, Pittsburgh has garnered a reputation as a livable and clean city. As part of this transformation, Pittsburgh is rediscovering its rivers.

The framework undergirding Pittsburgh’s river planning is the Riverfront Development Plan, which grew out of the 1989 Plan for Pittsburgh’s Riverfronts. The late 1990’s were a pivotal period for river planning in Pittsburgh: a separate Rivers Conservation Plan was developed, and the Riverlife Task Force (now Riverlife), a public-private partnership, was appointed by Mayor Tom Murphy. Riverlife developed an award-winning document, A Vision Plan for Pittsburgh’s Riverfronts (2001). Riverlife focused its initial energies on the creation of Three Rivers Park, to be a great urban park located at the rivers’ confluence. Most recently, a specific plan for the Allegheny River was developed (2009): the Allegheny Riverfront Vision Plan is a product of the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh, the City of Pittsburgh Department of City Planning, the mayor’s office, and Riverlife.

Key Goals
• Create interconnected linear waterfront development with extensive public access both to the waterfront and to the river itself
• Promote economic vitality
• Showcase the river’s history
• Repair and enhance the environment
• Provide seamless connections along the riverfront and into neighborhoods

Challenges and Issues
• Public spaces along the riverfront are disconnected from one another
• Poor connections in riverfront districts and limited access and views to the river
• Parks tend to be used for large events rather than daily activity

“The vision detailed in [The Vision Plan for Pittsburgh’s Riverfronts] proposes a radically different way of thinking about the rivers and the waterfront. Certainly, as Riverlife discovered in its community meetings, the rivers are many different things to many different people, repositories of a vast and varied range of hopes and expectations and uses. But where they come together – where their future lies – is as a center of community life. It is precisely their potential to meet so many different human needs – from the recreational to the aesthetic to the commercial – that gives the rivers their transcendent power. They are, very clearly, a “place”: a multi-faceted but nonetheless cohesive gathering point for a community and its idea of itself.”

-The Vision Plan for Pittsburgh’s Riverfronts, 2001